

Elisar von Kupffer (1872-1942)

Elisar von Kupffer, an aesthete of Baltic aristocratic ancestry, gained popularity in homosexual circles around 1900 with his anthology of homoerotic literature from antiquity to his own time, *Lieblingminne und Freundesliebe in der Weltliteratur* (1899). With his anthology the poet and painter Kupffer hoped to create a counterbalance to medical theories of homosexuality, especially those of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Magnus Hirschfeld. In fact, he rejected the terms 'homosexuality' or 'uranism' because to him these were loaded with the stigma of sickly deviation and effeminacy of men. Instead, he introduced the words *Lieblingminne* and *Freundesliebe* to indicate that same-sex love should be viewed not as a biomedical issue, but as a cultural and historical one. As he explained in the highly polemic introduction to his anthology, that was also published in Adolf Brand's *Der Eigene*, Greek boy-love, pedagogical eros, and the cult of romantic friendship in 18th and 19th-century Germany had been discredited by medical interference with same-sex love. Advocating a cultural-aesthetic and masculine-nationalist approach of homoeroticism, Kupffer set the tone for Brand's *Gemeinschaft der Eigenen*. In the light of his ardent plea for masculinity at the beginning of the century it is remarkable that, as a painter, Kupffer later elevated androgyny as the state of human perfection. Eros would span the gulf between the masculine and the feminine. Together with his friend Eduard von Mayer, he contrived an esoteric doctrine called *Klarismus*, for which he built the *Sanctuarium Artis Elisarion* in Minusio (Locarno) in Switzerland. The walls of this temple and museum in one consisted of a monumental painting by Kupffer of eighty-four strikingly similar naked ephebic youths in various positions.

Harry Oosterhuis